

National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission Final Report

Background

In the 2005 SAFETEA-LU bill, Congress commissioned a blue-ribbon panel to examine our national transportation system and its future needs. The twelve member commission of appointed experts spent two years conducting field hearings and studies on the current status of our infrastructure, the potential federal role in maintaining and expanding the system, and financing options for infrastructure improvements. The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission submitted their recommendations to Congress on January 15, 2008, initiating Congress' reauthorization process for SAFETEA-LU.

Key Findings

- The federal government should continue playing a strong role in the surface transportation system.
- The federal government should rethink its priorities and methods for involvement.
- Deferred maintenance and necessary expansions for anticipated population and economic growth will require an additional \$200 billion investment from federal, state and local entities every year until 2020.

Financing the Investment

- The Commission recommends that Congress look at several ways to finance this significant investment, including:
 - a 40 cent gas tax increase over 5 years
 - freight fees and a portion of customs fees diverted to freight-related projects
 - greater flexibility for tolls and pricing
 - increased use of public private partnerships

Streamlining the Process

- The Commission recommends the consolidation of the 108 programs currently run by USDOT into 10 broadly defined programs:
 - national assets
 - freight movement
 - congestion relief
 - safety
 - smaller city and rural needs

- intercity passenger rail
 - environmental stewardship
 - energy security
 - federal lands
 - research, development and technology
- They also recommend reducing the average time for project delivery by eliminating redundancies in the NEPA process and streamlining the permitting process. They would like to see the average delivery for major projects go from 13 years to 4 years.
- Finally, they suggest the creation of a BRAC-like commission to oversee the development of a national transportation plan and make recommendations to Congress on tax increases and select projects for funding.

Dissenting Opinions

Three of the Commissioners, Secretary Mary Peters, Maria Cino, and Rick Geddes, submitted a minority report to the Commission's findings. Their biggest concerns with the Commission's final recommendations are the continuance of the gas tax as the primary source of revenue for the Highway Trust Fund and the continued goal of federal participation in the system at 40%. Sec. Peters and the other Commissioners prefer congestion pricing and tolling to tax the system and that state and local government should play a stronger role in the financing and development of the system.

A link to the entire Commission report can be found at:
www.transportationfortomorrow.org

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